



## The Garden Club of the Upper Keys

# News & Notes

April 2021

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## General Membership Meeting

Please join us at 11:00 AM on Tuesday, April 20 for our monthly General Membership meeting. This is the first time in more than a year that we will meet at our beloved clubhouse. We will be meeting outdoors in the gardens. Members are welcome to arrive at 10 am to socialize prior to the meeting. Bring your favorite garden chair if you like, otherwise folding chairs are available. You will have the opportunity to see all of the new changes to the clubhouse. As a reminder, please wear masks inside the building and practice safe COVID measures outdoors.

### Meeting Agenda

- **Call to Order and Welcome:** President Kathy Janco will welcome members to our General Membership meeting.
- **Guest Speaker Presentation:** Program Director Laura Hartner will introduce our guest speaker, Mr. Misha D. McRae. Misha is the Executive Director of the Key West Botanical Garden Society.
- **Guest Speaker Presentation: "Growing your Garden: Today, Tomorrow and Forever."** Our speaker, Misha McRae, will discuss the learning process and strategic insights to the future of our garden club property. A brief introduction to his presentation is provided on page 2 of this newsletter.
- **Growing with the TDC Grant:** Vice-President Laurie Brooks and Grant Chairperson Charlene Regenhardt will share the projects we are able to do with funds received from the TDC (Tourist Development Council) Grant and their status. They will discuss the needs that you, as a club member, can assist with.
- **Business Meeting:** Presiding over the business meeting, President Janco will share recent Board actions and decisions. Members of the Board will provide highlights of the work accomplished in the past month.
- **Slate of Officers:** Kathy will introduce the Nomination Committee to present the slate of officers for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. The President will then call for nominations from the floor. If attendance at the meeting is enough for a quorum, we will commence with voting. If not enough members are present, we will hold the election via Survey Monkey the week after the General Membership meeting, with the results provided via an e-mail to membership. The proposed slate of officers is provided below.

### The nominating committee presents the 2021-2022 slate of officers for the Garden Club of the Upper Keys:

#### Executive Board

President	Kathy Janco
Vice – Pres	Laurie Brooks
Secretary	Laura Hartner
Treasurer	Anne Makowsky

#### Directors

Fundraising	Kathy Holmes
Hospitality	Beth Ann Gear & Fran Reig

House	Chris Hudson
Membership	Charlene Regenhardt
Program	Patti Graham
Property	Nancy Perez
Publicity	Pat Uhl

#### Nomination Committee

Patti Graham, Kathy Holmes, Nancy Perez



*Looking  
forward to  
seeing you in  
person on April  
20th!*

The Garden Club  
of the  
Upper Keys, Inc.  
at  
The Francis Tracy  
Garden Center  
94040 Overseas Hwy.  
Key Largo, FL 33037

Mailing Address  
P.O. Box 373  
Tavernier, FL 33070

#### Board of Directors

President - Kathy Janco  
V-President - Laurie Brooks  
Treasurer - Anne Makowsky  
Secretary - Laura Hartner  
Directors of:  
Fundraising - Kathy Holmes  
Hospitality - Betty Ann Gear  
and Fran Reig  
House - Christine Hudson  
Membership - Charlene  
Regenhardt  
Program - Laura Hartner  
Property - Beverly Middleton  
Publicity - Patti Graham

### *From the desk of President Kathy Janco ...*

What a wonderful time of year it is in the fabulous Florida Keys. We have so much to look forward to – spring is here even though it looks like fall. We have a short number of days of spring air to get our personal and garden club gardens in order before the mosquitoes and heat arrive. I will be enjoying every moment as I know you will be as well.

This time of year gives us a chance to see and enjoy the beauty in our gardens and our tropical Island with many blooming flowers, butterflies, and birds while waiting for the much-needed rain of summer.

Yes, it does not end there, we will still enjoy the great outdoors throughout the summer months as well. Each month has something special to offer you just have to look.

*"We breathe air exhaled from trees whose leaves are made  
of starlight... Our veins echo the patterns of rivers,  
branches, and root systems. We are not a part of Nature.  
We are Nature."*

*~ Marysia Miernowska*

I look forward to seeing each other in person for our April 20, 2021, general membership meeting in our wonderful shared garden at the Garden Club.

My best to you and yours,  
Kathy

### **Growing your Garden: Today, Tomorrow and Forever**

The April 20th program will be presented by Micha McRae, Executive Director of the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden. A 25 year resident of Key West, Misha was a business owner who joined the Key West Botanical Garden Society in 1997—first as a volunteer, then as a Society member, a member of the Board of Directors and ultimately as the first Executive Administrator in 2004. With a degree in mathematics and accounting, he applied his administrative, financial, human resources, and customer service background to help the organization grow.

The Key West Botanical Garden Society, Inc. is a registered 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation. The Garden is publicly owned and operated as a passive, natural resource-based public outdoor recreational site. Visit their website at [www.keywest.garden](http://www.keywest.garden) and Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/keywestbotanicalgarden> for current Botanical Garden news.

Mr. McRae will focus on the learning process and strategic insights to our own Francis Tracy Garden Center's future. He will help us to envision what a garden open to the public entails based on his expertise and experiences helping the Key West Botanical Garden grow as an organization and achieve its overall mission.

Our own mission statement for GCUK is very similar to the Key West organization. With the energy and vision of our members, as well as the TDC grant to help support some initial funding, we are at a similar crossroads in growing our organization, increasing public visibility, and achieving our mission. Mr. McRae's presentation will provide us with additional guidance to help us successfully achieve our future goals.



## A note from the editor...

This month's newsletter and guest speaker topic for our upcoming General Membership meeting is focused on the future. Many seeds have been sown over the past year with the future in mind:

- The work on much-needed updates to the clubhouse, which was initiated last summer, is nearly complete. The entire space is refreshed—wait 'till you see it!
- The Adopt-a-Bed Program that President Kathy Janco initiated continues to evolve. Volunteers have cleaned up and pruned their individual gardens and are eager to help them grow and thrive. They will help shape the future of their adopted beds. In many cases, that will involve adding some new plants to further enhance the appearance and educational value.
- Nearly a year ago, we submitted an application to the Monroe County Tourism Development Council for a Bricks and Mortar grant. We were successful in receiving an award that will help finance some capital improvements to support our future goals. The main elements of the project will be discussed at our April meeting, and work is underway!
- GCUK is registered on Plantsmap.com, a website that hosts botanical collections. We have documented 58 plants from our gardens so far, but wish to have many more documented by mid-summer. The website was featured in the November *News & Notes*. This initiative is tied to the TDC grant.

- Our guest speaker, Micha McRae, Executive Director of the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden is providing a presentation to help us envision the future of our gardens. His experience and expertise gained from undertaking a similar transformation for the Key West Gardens will be invaluable in helping us make improvements that are aligned with our club's mission to "develop, promote, protect and conserve the natural beauty of the Upper Keys."

It is now up to us to nurture the seeds sown to enable our club to continue to grow and thrive. Going back to the Survey Monkey survey conducted last September, our members overwhelmingly indicated an interest in "*rejuvenating our efforts to maintain and enhance the gardens at our clubhouse and helping to turn it into an ecotourism destination*" (62 percent of respondents). I encourage everyone to share their ideas and knowledge, and participate in shaping our future.

Also looking to the future, we have a new slate of officers to vote on at the April meeting. Now that we have finally resumed in-person meetings at the clubhouse, albeit outdoors for the remainder of this year, I hope we have enough members present to achieve a quorum and vote. Please join us if you can!

Cordially,  
Charlene Regenhardt



## Notes from the Directors...

**HOSPITALITY CO-DIRECTORS Betty Ann Gear and Fran Reig** need volunteers to help with meetings at the clubhouse in April and May. Assistance includes helping set-up, clean-up, and refreshments. If you are interested in helping out, please call Betty Ann or Fran.

**HOUSE DIRECTOR Christine Hudson** reports the following progress on house maintenance: Remember how tiny the light at the end of the tunnel appeared a year ago? It is now bright, even blinding, as we near the end of our updates. The kitchen is sparkling; the meeting room patched and painted; the sunroom ceiling painted white and the same soft shade of blue green throughout. The bathrooms sinks are sporting new fixtures, even the light switches have new plates. Thanks to our Club members and a troop of fabulous volunteers!

**PROPERTY DIRECTOR Beverly Middleton** continues to work on the gardens. Please stop by to help weed, water, and plan enhancements to the landscaping.

**VICE-PRESIDENT AND DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH AND EDUCATION Laurie Brooks** announces that we are cooking again for God's Kitchen on April 29<sup>th</sup>. Laurie will be out of town, so please respond to Edna Waldorf if you can help out. Her contact information is on the Resource Links Page.

The most recent Florida Keys Native Plant ID class with Jim Duquesnel was held by Zoom on March 16. The topic was the genus *Chiococca* (snowberries) and the speaker was FIU's Alan Franck. The next class will be on Tuesday April 20 from 5:30 to 7:00 with Jim Duquesnel who is looking for suggested topics!

The next work day for the REEF butterfly, Connect to Protect and Ocean Unity display gardens is Saturday, April 17 from 10 to 11 am. We will perform general garden maintenance. REEF work days will now be regularly scheduled on the third Sunday of each month except May, which will be on the 30<sup>th</sup>. Our last work day was on March 20<sup>th</sup>.

(Continued on page 4)



## Notes from the Directors...

(Continued from page 3)

The second Master Gardener plant clinic was held at Francis Tracy Garden Center (FTGC) on March 17<sup>th</sup> from 9-12 and the next one will be April 21<sup>st</sup> from 9-12. Michelle Leonard-Mullarz, Lonell Rice, Suzy Cushman and Laurie participated. Holding the clinic in the garden provides the added benefit of being surrounded by living exemplars of plants for identification and horticultural practices. Following the plant clinic, Laurie led a group around to look at the assigned garden beds and discussed the nine principles of Florida Friendly gardening. Attendees received a handout consisting of articles from our newsletter.

**PROGRAM DIRECTOR Laura Hartner** continues to line up events for our upcoming General Membership meetings. Last month, Michelle Leonard-Mullarz, Environmental Horticultural Agent for the UF/IFAS Monroe County Extension Service presented an informative program entitled, "Backyard Bugs: The Good and The Bad." The slides from her presentation are to be posted on our website's Links page.

We are leaving our ZOOM General membership meetings and moving OUTDOORS at the FTGC for our April 20 meeting. Micha McRae, Executive Director of the Key West Tropical Forest & Botanical Garden will be our program speaker. Following his presentation, Vice-President Laurie Brooks and GCUK Grant Chairperson Charlene Regenhardt will provide a brief summary of the TDC grant, and how members can participate. See page 1 for more information.

Our May 18, 2021 meeting will also be outdoors for our annual Pot-Luck lunch and Installation of officers at FTGC. As with our Holiday Gathering, members will be asked to bring their own bagged lunch. The club will offer cupcakes for dessert and iced tea and water for beverages. A "Plant Swap" is also planned. More information will be provided in the next newsletter.

Two Garden Get-Togethers were held in March. The first featured Laurie Brooks who presented a "hands-on" primer on how to take care of your garden bed using Florida Friendly Gardening principles. The second get-together focused on making a tiny reed basket with five members in attendance.

Two Garden Get-Togethers are planned for April. On Thursday, April 22 at 10:00 AM, another session of tiny reed basket making will take place. Several members were unable to attend the first session and others might be inspired by the photos included in this newsletter of

the baskets members made in March. Cost for the reeds to make one basket is \$3 and a list of materials you will need to bring and directions will be e-mailed to you once you let Laura now you are participating.

The next Garden Get-Together is Tuesday, April 27 at 10:00 AM and will focus on using air dry clay to make one or more of the following: a small clay pot for a succulent, a teardrop air plant holder and/or a small wall planter. More information is posted on page 5.

To attend either or both of the Garden Get-Togethers, please contact Laura by e-mail, text, or cell phone.

**PUBLICITY DIRECTOR Patti Graham** and her team would like to remind members to continue visiting our Website and Facebook pages. Photos from recent activities have been posted to our Club website and Facebook. Please come to our April 20th meeting and join us for the Garden Get-Togethers. Take lots of pictures for our Website and Facebook page!

**FUNDRAISING DIRECTOR Kathy Holmes** is working on fundraising options. We have rescheduled our two signature fund raisers for next year. The Gingerbread Craft Market will be Saturday November 27, 2021 at the FTGC and our Garden Walk will be Saturday, February 19, 2022. If you know of any properties for the Garden Walk, please contact Kathy (contact information is provided on the Resource Links page).

To help make up for the cancellation of the 2020-2021 fundraisers, the board decided to host a yard sale this coming fall. It is scheduled for Saturday, October 23, 2021 from 9 AM to 5 PM. Based on the results of the yard sale in 2019, it was decided that we would NOT sell books, except for children's books. Please begin saving items for the sale this coming fall, including lightly used household items, small furniture or lamps, kitchenware, toys, collectables, and clothing. We also plan to sell plants, so make a mental note to propagate some plants this summer if you are inclined to donate some. Meetings are underway to plan this event and more details will be forthcoming.

Please consider how you can be a part of these events. Kathy will need all hands on deck!

Kathy is also looking for people with technical computer skills to help put together a video link for a virtual garden tour.

**MEMBERSHIP DIRECTOR Charlene Regenhardt** is processing membership forms. So far, 54 individual members and 36 family members have replied. We also have 7 honorary and 4 complimentary members, for a total of 101.

# Garden Get-Togethers and Club-Sponsored Activities

## In-person Plant Clinics

The clinics are held at our gardens every third Wednesday from 9 am to noon. The next clinic is scheduled for April 21<sup>st</sup>. Masks and social distancing are required.

## Workday at the Clubhouse

The April workday is scheduled for Saturday, April 17 at 11 am. Although many invasive plants have been removed, we wish to continue this effort and to tidy up areas that aren't currently maintained under our Adopt a Bed initiative. The goal is to spruce up the property for the upcoming General Membership meeting the following Tuesday. As with the previous workdays, we will provide bottled water and a light snack.

## April 22 Garden Get-Together

On Thursday, April 22, 2021 at 10 am, Laura is offering a second opportunity to make a small basket at a Garden Get-Together. The basket is pictured. It measures approximately 3½ inches long by 2½ inches wide and is 2 inches high with a handle extending 2½ inches.

For the project, Laura Hartner will supply the reeds for a small cost of \$3. You will need to bring the following:

- Awl, icepick or small screwdriver— for tucking ends of materials into weave
- Clip clothes pins— to hold pieces as you weave
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Pail or large container for soaking reeds
- Tape measure
- Towel



If you are interested in making a basket, please email [Programdirector@gardenclubupperkeys.org](mailto:Programdirector@gardenclubupperkeys.org) by Tuesday, April 20. Group size is limited to 10 members.

## April 27 Garden Get-Together

The Garden Get-Together on Tuesday, April 27 at 10:00 AM will have participants make plant containers from air-dry clay. One can choose from making a small pot that would hold a succulent, a clay hanger for an air plant, or a wall planter for dry foliage.

For these projects, you will need to bring:

- Air hardening modeling clay. (I used DAS Air hardening modelling clay, a 2.2 lb. package from Amazon cost \$11.28 with tax. You can bring your

own clay or Laura can purchase it for you if you let her know by April 20th. You can also share a package with a friend.)

- A flat surface to work on. Laura purchased a plastic placemat from the Dollar Store. An old cookie sheet might do to roll your clay.
- An old rolling pin. Again, you can buy one at the Dollar Store, or share the one Laura will bring.
- A plastic knife
- A plastic ruler
- Objects to make an impression or design in the clay, if desired, such a small fern leaf, small fork, bottle cap, doily, or other textured item.
- A piece of cardboard to carry your piece(s) home.

Laura will bring:

- Cut bottles for the planter.
- a form to use to cut the bottom piece of the planter
- metal straws for making holes in the clay
- Wooden rollers that make impressions in the clay
- Paper plates for the wall planter

Your pieces may need more than 24 hours to dry. The clay will dry white although you can purchase clay that is red-clay colored. After the piece is dry, you can paint it with acrylic paint. Laura suggests that your piece is finished with an acrylic sealer; she will arrange to share hers with you.

If you are interested in making a basket, please email [Programdirector@gardenclubupperkeys.org](mailto:Programdirector@gardenclubupperkeys.org) by Tuesday, April 20. Group size is limited to 10 members.



*Pictured left to right: small pot, air plant holder, wall vase drying. Pictured below, supplies needed.*





## Basket Making Garden Get-Together

Five members attended the most recent Garden Get-together to make small baskets. If you would like to make one at the April 22 Garden Get-together, please contact Laura Hartner.



## Mystery Tree Solved

Terry Estep and a few others knew the identity of the mystery tree shown last month.

The tree is called a shaving brush tree (*Pseudobombax ellipticum*, *Bombax ellipticum*). This tree was donated by Claude & Raquel Plyler. They have a giant specimen in their park. Unfortunately, ours has been neglected and is struggling to survive. About a week after the newsletter was published, the tree showed off its spectacular blooms.



After learning the name and doing a little research, it appears that the tree should be in more fertile soil and needs more water than it has received in its current location. Perhaps we can nurture it and help it recover so that it will continue to grace us with its beautiful flowers for years to come.







## Plant of the Month

### Staghorn Fern

(*Platycerium sp.*)

by Laurie Brooks

We have a magnificent specimen staghorn fern hanging from a wild tamarind tree in the Vanilla Orchid garden bed. Several other impressive specimens are scattered throughout the FTGC property, and we recently received a generous donation from a couple in Key Largo of two additional and valuable beauties.

The two species most commonly sold in the United States as ornamentals are both native to Australia and ours are most likely *Platycerium bifurcatum*. The other common species is *Platycerium veitchii*. The name *Platycerium* comes from the Greek and means flat horned referring to the fertile fronds of the fern which look like the antlers of an elk or moose.

Staghorn ferns are epiphytes which means they spend their lives attached to other plants or trees in their natural environments. Their roots are minimal and used strictly for attachment and support while their fronds (leaves) supply protection for the roots and receive nourishment from the environment. The roots require good drainage to avoid root rot.

The ferns have two types of fronds. The flattened, hard, round “shield” fronds, also called basal fronds, cover and protect the root ball as it attaches to a tree or a mounting board and take up nutrients for the fern. The shield fronds may turn brown and that is okay – they should never be removed.

The antler shaped fronds jutting out from the center of the plant are also called foliar fronds. These are the “fertile” fronds that carry the reproductive organs or sori that are usually located on the lobes or at the sinus between frond lobes. Gardeners will sometimes see what looks like brown felt on the tips of the fronds and wonder if it's a cause for concern—it's just the normal sporangia they're seeing. Ferns reproduce by spores that are born in sporangia clustered in the sori.

Staghorn ferns are native to the tropics and require bright, indirect or diffused light to thrive. They are not like the ground growing ferns of shady northern forests. While they should not be exposed to direct sunlight, they do require bright light and benefit from Southern or Eastern exposures indoors. Under and over-watering are the most common causes of staghorn fern failure. Like many orchids they benefit from both misting and soaking. A fine mist sprayed over the entire plant



Staghorn fern hanging from wild tamarind in the Vanilla Orchid Bed.

including the underside of the fronds is beneficial as is high humidity, which we have here out-of-doors most of the year. The plants do absorb water through their roots as well so periodically soaking the root ball especially during the dry season is important as is allowing the root ball to drip dry to prevent root rot. If the antler fronds begin to brown or blacken at their base this is a sign of over-watering. If the browning occurs at the antler tips the plant is not getting enough water.



Staghorn fern in wedge apple tree along western side of property.

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Staghorn ferns do benefit from a water-soluble balanced 1:1:1 fertilizer during their periods of active growth (spring and summer). Care information can be found at <https://pistilnursery.com/blogs/journal/staghorn-fern-care> or at the UF/IFAS Gardening Solutions website: [Staghorn Fern - University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences \(ufl.edu\)](https://staghorn-fern-University-of-Florida-Institute-of-Food-and-Agricultural-Sciences(ufl.edu))

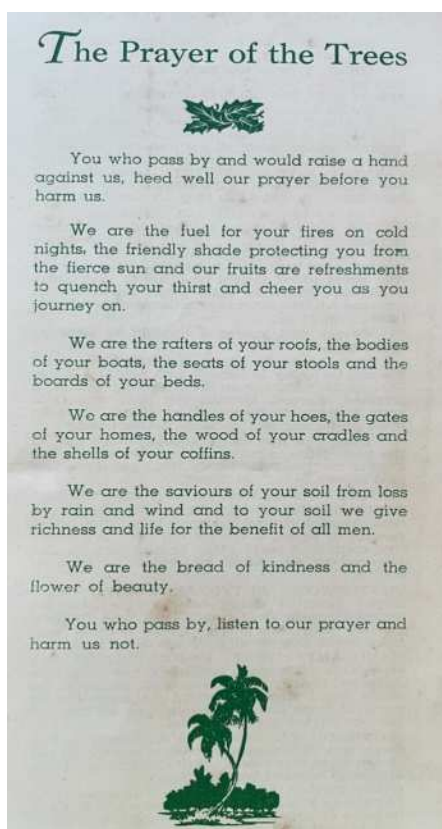


*A generous couple from Key Largo recently gave our Garden Club two large staghorn ferns. They are more than 40 years old.*

## GCUK History Prayer of the Trees

By Gerry Yeager and Charlene Regenhardt

The prayer shown in the photo below was part of a native tree handout that was used by the club over the years. Gerry Yeager, our archivist, found the poem in the club archives and said that the source was unknown but first used in the 1960s.



After some internet searching, I found what I believe to be the source of the poem. It appears that it was modified (perhaps to be more suited to the Keys environment) from the poem "Prayer of the Woods," which was originally written in Portuguese by the poet Alberto de Veiga Simoes in May 1914. Some of the internet sources I found say that the prayer has been used in the Portuguese forest preservations for more than 1,000 years, so perhaps the poem was based on some folklore... but it is unknown whether that is true.

The English translation of the original poem, which is shown below, is a little different than the pictured version. Although the title is different, several of the stanzas are strikingly similar. It is possible that different versions arose from paraphrasing and translating the original,

but that's just speculation on my part.

The Portuguese version of the poem is inscribed in stone near a tree inside the walls of the Castelo de S. Jorge, a castle in Lisbon, Portugal. The original poem was titled 'Ao Viandante' which translates roughly as: "To the person who passes through this place."

This poem is often seen at the start of forest trails in the US and Canada as well as in Europe. Hence, it serves as a message for travelers along those trails. The poem has become so well-known among American nature-lovers and hikers that it made its way into popular culture. Canadian singer-songwriter Tony Dekker of the band Great Lakes Swimmers recorded a musical version of the poem in 2013.

### Prayer of the Woods, by Alberto de Veiga Simoes

You that pass and raise your arm to me  
before you hurt me, look at me well.  
I am the heat of your home in the cold winter nights.  
I am the friendly shade that you find  
when walking under the August sun  
And my fruits are appetizing freshness  
That satisfy your thirst on the way.  
I am the friendly beam of your house, the board of your table  
the bed in which you rest and the wood of your boat.  
I am handle of your hoe, the door of your dwelling  
the wood of your cradle and of your own coffin.  
I am the bread of goodness and the flower of beauty.  
You that pass, look at me well and do no harm.



# Gardening Best Practices

## Composting

by Lonell Rice

Black Gold. That's the description given to composted material—it's so rich and dark. Add it to your landscape beds to give your plants the rich, organic matter they need to thrive. So why compost?

Compost is good for your plants for a variety of reasons:

- It amends our limestone soil with organic matter, making the soil more fertile, more textured, and able to retain more water.
- It adds major and minor nutrients.
- It reduces the need for fertilizer that, if overused, isn't good for our near-shore waters.
- Composting yard waste and food waste reduces waste going into landfills.
- The best part about composting is the compost is free!

### So how do you get started composting?

First, you need to decide on where your compost pile or bin will be located and what kind of retaining structure (if any) you'll use. You can put your compost pile in the sun or in the shade, but putting it in the sun will hasten the composting process. Sun helps increase the temperature, so the bacteria and fungi work faster. This also means that your pile will dry out faster, especially during the drier winter months. If you're doing a free-form pile, it needs to be about 3' x 3'.

Purchased compost bins come in a variety of shapes and sizes, or you can build your own. Check the internet for bins or screens that will contain your compostable materials. Pinterest has lots of ideas posted. An inexpensive way to build your own bin is to join four wood pallets to form a rectangle or square (leaving one side open). Another inexpensive bin is wire screening wrapped around four upright poles.

Place the bin in your designated location. I put landscape cloth under my bin to keep nearby tree's roots from growing up into the pile but still allow water to seep through. (Be sure to add some black if you do this, see the Cold and Fast method below.) Rotating compost tumblers that allow you to turn and mix the material are also available. These are more expensive but very effective.

Compostable materials need to be either carbon-based (brown) or nitrogen-based (green.) A healthy compost pile maintains a working balance between these two. A simple rule of thumb is to use one-third green and two-thirds brown materials. Brown materials such as branches, stems, dried leaves, peels, bits of wood, bark dust or sawdust (not from pressure-treated wood), shredded paper, coffee filters, coffee grounds, egg shells, straw, and peat moss give compost its light, fluffy texture. Green materials such as food scraps, green lawn clippings, kitchen waste, manures, and green leaves provide raw materials for making enzymes. Never add meat, bones, fish, fat, cooked vegetables, dairy products, diseased pesticide-treated plant material, or dog/cat feces. Good composting hygiene means covering fresh green material with brown material.

## BEGIN WITH THE BIN

Though some gardeners build a free-form compost pile, most people favor a bin for tidiness.

**a** compost container can be as simple as used pallets screwed together or a circle of snow fence. Some people use three bins: one being filled, one full and breaking down, and a third with finished compost ready to spread. Make sure the sides have spaces to let in air because oxygen is necessary for decomposition. Bins at least 3 foot square are best, but more compact ones are available for small yards. Popular styles include:



### TUMBLER

Off-the-ground tumblers are compact enough for small yards and keep out rodents. Though it's a low-volume bin, the turning action makes compost quickly if moistened regularly.

**FCMP Outdoor Tumbling Composter**, \$100; [homedepot.com](http://homedepot.com)



### CEDAR

If you're handy, build a bin of rot-resistant cedar with spaces between the planks. Or buy a prefabricated bin, such as this 28-inch square one. **Cedar Compost Bin**, \$249; [gardeners.com](http://gardeners.com)



### BALES

Stacked like building blocks to make a box, straw or hay bales keep the pile moist and warm all the way to the edges. When the compost is finished, the straw or hay can be used as layers in the next pile.



### TRAP WIRE

Designed for lobster traps, these rugged vinyl-covered steel panels can be formed into any size or shape bin. Black plastic ties to join the panels are included. **Trap Wire Compost Bin**, \$165; [johnnyseeds.com](http://johnnyseeds.com)

*Types of compost bins. Source, Better Homes & Gardens, November 2020.*

## Methods to use

Two popular methods used to create compost are “Cold and Slow” and “Hot and Fast.”

**Cold and Slow** is used by the majority of DIY composters. You use a layer of green (nitrogen) and a layer of brown (carbon) using more brown than green. This method takes longer and doesn't kill seeds or pathogens since it has little or no heat. To speed up the decomposition, I like to add a little black (soil or humus) which contains microbes, kind of like a “starter.” (If your pile starts to smell, you're using too much green.) Add water regularly to promote decomposition and turn or mix the material on a regular basis. Depending on how much material you're adding, a good frequency to start with is monthly. Count on it taking a minimum of six months to decompose.

**Hot and Fast** is based on generating heat. This is the most intensive method, and it kills seeds and pathogens if the materials reach at least 130 degrees for three days. (Yes, there are thermometers made to measure compost temperature.) It requires filling a compost bin a minimum of one cubic yard (3' x 3' x 3'). You need to keep the pile moist but the moisture shouldn't exceed 70%. A hot, steamy pile means that you have a large community of microscopic critters working away at making compost. You need to turn the pile, or aerate, it frequently. A good frequency to start with is bi-weekly. If you're diligent, you could see compost in 2-3 months.

## How to start

Start by collecting your initial yard waste; green includes trimmed leaves, shrub clippings, and grass clippings, while brown includes dried leaves, branches, and twigs. Make sure the pieces aren't too big by breaking the branches into smaller pieces. Some leaves such as



Finished compost. Photo Source: Washington Post.



Photo Source: Kinder Garden: Compost, from garbage to gold; The Indian Express website, by Sachin Gupta, July 27, 2018.

palm fronds, banana plant leaves and sea grape leaves are very slow at decomposing. You may not want to use them to start. If you use kitchen scraps such as banana peels, orange peels, or potato peels, be sure to remove those little vegetable stickers as those don't decompose well either. Most DIY composters keep a covered container in their kitchen to accumulate the kitchen waste. I use an old plastic coffee can with a lid and empty it into my compost pile frequently.

Start your pile by layering green and brown, using more brown than green, and maybe some black. Layering will occur over time as you add yard waste and kitchen scraps. Water after the first few layers and continue layering and watering. Be careful not to overwater or your pile will just rot. Turn or aerate your pile. When turning the compost pile, make sure that materials in the center are brought to the outsides, and that materials from the outside edges are brought to the center.

## When is it ready?

Your compost is ready when you see the decomposed material looking like soil and you can no longer recognize the individual materials added to the pile. There should be no heat and no chunks, only small pieces. Depending on the method, compost might take anywhere from 2 months to 2 years. Transfer your compost to your garden and enjoy the fruits of your labor.

## References

<https://learn.eartheasy.com/guides/composting/>

<https://web.extension.illinois.edu/compost/process.cfm>



## Workdays are Continuing to Make a Big Difference!

By Charlene Regenhardt

Work on sprucing up the grounds and site preparation for grant projects continues. Last month, several member volunteers emptied most items from the outdoor storage shed to prepare for the walls to be strengthened and hardened off. That work is now complete and we will be moving items back into the space once we level off the floor with some additional gravel.

The area around the sea grape was also cleaned up in preparation for installing new faucets on the north side of the building as well as site prep for construction of the shade house. Before and after pictures below show the progress.

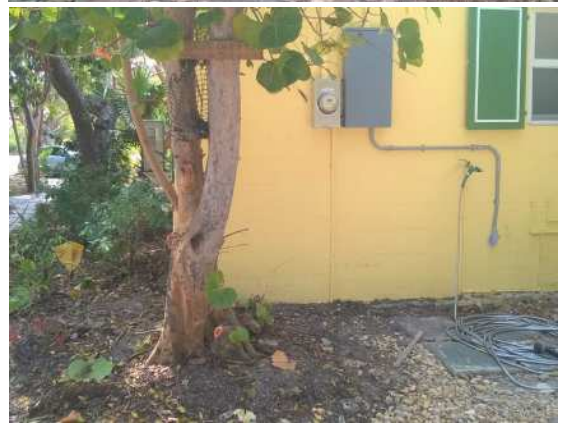
### Before (left) and After (right) Photos



*The storage shed was reconstructed with a concrete footer and "real" walls finished with hardi panel siding. An exterior steel door was moved to the north side of the storage shed to improve access after the plant nursery/shade house is constructed.*



*The rocks and pavers around the sea grape were cleared to improve accessibility for the new faucets and to remove obstacles that might impede construction of the plant nursery/shadehouse.*



*New outdoor faucets and hose reels were installed near the front and back corner of the clubhouse to facilitate watering.*



# Notable Dates and Birthdays

A warm birthday wish to our members with April birthdays!

## April

- Kathleen C.
- DeeDee B.
- Ron C.
- Kathy T.
- Diane C.
- Jenny C.
- Marilyn R.



## Upcoming meetings and club activities:

### April

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	

13	GCUK Board Meeting (10 am)
17	REEF Workday (10 am)
17	GCUK Workday (11 am)
20	GCUK General Membership Meeting outdoors at The Francis Tracy Garden Center (11:00 am) Social hour begins at 10:00 am.
20	Florida Native Plant ID Class (Zoom, 5:30 pm)
21	In-person Monroe County Plant Clinic at Francis Tracy Garden Center (9 am to 12 pm)
22	Garden Get-Together: Basket making (10 am)
27	Garden Get-Together: Air-dry clay projects (10 am)
29	Cooking for God's Kitchen (TBD)

### May

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

11	GCUK Board Meeting (10 am)
18	GCUK General Membership Meeting outdoors at The Francis Tracy Garden Center (11:00 am)
18	Florida Native Plant ID Class (Zoom, 5:30 pm)
19	In-person Monroe County Plant Clinic at Francis Tracy Garden Center (9 am to 12 pm)
30	REEF Workday (10 am)
30	GCUK Workday (11 am)

## Looking Forward...

- **Board meetings** at 10 am on Apr 13, May 11
- **General Membership meetings** on Apr 20, May 18. Meetings begin at 11 am; If held in the clubhouse, doors open at 10 am for social time.
- **Next Years' Fundraising Event** dates have been set. A Yard Sale will be held on October 23, 2021; please save lightly used items to sell at this event. The Gingerbread Craft Market is scheduled for November 27, 2021 and the Garden Walk is scheduled for February 19, 2022.



## Out & About at Francis Tracy Garden Center

A few pictures captured over the past month are posted below. Not much is blooming due to our drought.



*The devil's backbone (aka zigzag plant) in the Song of India Bed is blooming.*



*Patti Graham and her husband Felton stopped by last weekend to help with some cleanup around the yard. They also loaded construction debris from the shed project and yard waste into their truck and took it to the dump. Felton was using a pitchfork to load the yard waste, so I asked them to pose for a photo reminiscent of the "American Gothic" painting.*



*I often see a green anole when I visit the gardens. This one was climbing on the trellis in the Peace Park Garden. I sometimes see one on the prickly pear cactus as well. I guess the barbed hairs (glochids) don't bother him as much as they bother me!*



*Here's another green anole on a natal plum shrub.*